COMMON EQUITY NSW

Newsletter

WINTER EDITION // AUGUST 2024

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COMMON EQUITY
CO-OPERATIVE
HOUSING

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Front cover photo: Palace Women's Housing Co-op's garden spoil
Photo credit: Jamie James

Do you have a story to tell?

Let the sector know what your Co-op has been doing!

Contact nicole@commonequity.com.au or call 02 9356 9223

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land throughout Australia and pay our respects to them, their culture and their Elders, past and present. Always was, always will be Aboriginal land.

A message from the CEO

Welcome to the 2024 winter edition of our Newsletter. These bi-annual newsletters highlight and provide information on activities relevant to our vibrant co-op housing sector.

In this edition we put the spotlight on Marrickville Arabic housing co-op; hear from one of the members of the CCA Working Groupon the review process; and highlight some recent special events and media coverage.

A big thanks to our Editorial Board of co-op members who with Nicole put these Newsletters together. Also, a special shout out to Melanie for her time and input on the Editorial Board whilst she was there.

It is always important to promote the value and benefits of Co-op Housing where we can and the valuable role it can play in creating a diverse affordable housing system. Our Newsletters contribute to this promotion. Your input for future articles is always welcome. Please contact Nicole with any ideas or contributions.

Yours in co-operation,

Nick Sabel

Nick Sabel, CEO

Growing the sector, housing more people

What a great celebration!

Officially opening the expansion of Lac Viet Co-op in Cabramatta.

Local MP Mr Vo officiated the event and MP Dai Le attended to share her support. Both highlighted the importance of affordable and secure housing for people in the area, particularly for older people. Unfortunately, older people are a growing cohort of people facing homelessness. The Cabramatta Co-op specifically targets seniors from culturally diverse backgrounds. Other stakeholders from Homes NSW, the Community Housing Industry Association, the Department of Communities & Justice also joined us in the celebrations, and the amazing project managers (Nasr Group) and architects (Stanton Dahl).

With input from existing co-op members, the property has been beautifully designed and build. One tenant even stated that it doesn't look like a rental at all.

The tenants welcomed us all warmly, even providing live musical interludes.

While site A now completed, site B is still under construction and should be completed by end of 2024.

The building and tenants were highlighted in a recent Homes NSW video submission to the Urban Development Institute of Australia NSW, helping them win an award for excellence in affordable housing. You can view the video on the CENSW website homepage. *commonequity.com.au*

CO-OP SPOTLIGHT

Alex Massaoud

MARRICKVILLE ARABIC HOUSING CO-OPERATIVE

Alex has lived at his property with his family since 1995, prior he was a tenant of Marrickville Area Community Housing (MACH).

During the mid 1990's MACH identified a need for housing for Arabic families in the Marrickville area and was successful in obtaining 10 properties through an Office of Community Housing tender process.

In 1998 with the help of the Association to Resource Co-operative Housing (ARCH), the 10 households formed the Marrickville Arabic Housing Co-operative and became members of ARCH. There was a real need for affordable, secure housing for young Arabic families in the Marrickville area.

Alex and the other 9 households found out about co-operative Housing through MACH and then worked with ARCH, undertaking training on how to be a co-operative.

Alex is the Chair of the co-operative and its spokesperson.

Over the years each of the 7 principles of co-operation have meant different things for the co-operative.

In the beginning voluntary open membership and democratic member control were very important. Likewise, as a new co-operative it was education, training and information which was essential. Members of the co-operative did ongoing training with ARCH. This was a slow process as members of the co-operative did not have English as a first language and translating educational resources was necessary. Also, as newly arrived migrants we were not familiar with how to work with government departments.

As the co-operative developed, autonomy and independence were important. "We were proud that we were able manage our properties. We were one of the first co-operatives to receive an A pass in all areas of the Community Housing Performance Based Registration process", Alex says. COVID and its aftermath has presented new issues for the co-op. Having face to face meetings was difficult as many members have acute medical conditions and needed to be very careful. Phone and zoom meetings have become more frequent.

"We is not as satisfactory as meeting face to face but is necessary for the time being.

Concern for community as always been integral to the co-op. From the beginning, being from a minority religious group within the Arabic community members were very active with our Church and our community.

The co-op also organised social activities together such as community dinners and games nights.

Being active in the community has become harder as co-op members have become older.

"[Now] Members have ongoing health issues, and we tend to spend more time at the doctors every year" observes Alex.

Co-op Housing & CENSW making headlines!

abc listen

11 JUNE 2024

Co-operative housing one way to ease strain

EAST SIDE 89.7 FM

ELIZABETH FARRELLY, 16 MAY 2024

The Sydneyist

Elizabeth Farrelly interviews City of Sydney Councillor Sylvie Ellsmore about co-op housing.

9NEWS

MIRIAH DAVIS, 9 APRIL 2024

Australia's first housing cooperative dedicated to transgender women to be built in Sydney

ABC NEWS

LILY NOTHLING, 20 JULY 2024

Students embrace co-operative housing as a solution to rental and cost-of-living crisis...

LSJ ONLINE

CAT WOODS, 3 JULY 2024

Could co-operative housing solve the current crisis?

The Sydney Morning Herald
INDEPENDENT. ALWAYS.

ANDREW TAYLOR, 115 JUNE 2024

Gray pays $115 a week in rent. But there's a catch...

THE WEEKLY SOURCE

IAN HORSWILL, 29 APRIL 2024

Common Equity's Senior Housing Micro Cap for the Vietnamese community in Cabramatta, Sydney, opens

SBS News

ALEISHA ORR, 25 JUNE 2024

Yvonne doesn't own her home. This housing alternative means she never worries about rent.

PinkNews

CHANTELLE BILLSON, 20 MAY 2024

Sydney's first dedicated affordable housing for trans women designed to deliver 'positive outcomes'

star observer

GRACE JOHNSON, 29 MARCH 2024

Sydney's first dedicated affordable housing for transgender women

THE PROJECT

29 JULY 2024

Housing co-ops could revolutionise how we think about housing as Aussies battle a housing crisis. But what is a housing co-op, and how does it work?

The Guardian

TAMSIN ROSE, 22 MARCH 2024

Sydney's first dedicated affordable housing for transgender women to be built in Darlinghurst

THE CONVERSATION

LOUISE CRABTREE-HAYES, 15 MARCH 2024

'I'm home': how co-operative housing could take pressure off Australia's housing crisis...

CCA UPDATE

Collaborating and finding better solutions together...

Following two CCA consultation sessions (the last in November 2023), the CCA Working Group was established, made up with one or two representatives from each co-op across NSW. The CCA Working Group objective was to meet between February and May 2024 to review the CCA and hand down a recommendations report to CENSW.

The sessions took place at University of Technology, Sydney in Ultimo on 3rd February, 16th March and 4th May, facilitated by Scott from an external consulting organisation, Gauge Consulting (who also facilitated the consultation sessions in 2023). There was a great attendance rate with approximately 30-35 members attending each session.

Our Working Group members

The first session focused on providing context for Working Group representatives, including an exploration of the challenges and strengths for both CENSW and co-ops, historically and into the future.

The second session focused on the review of key issues of non-compliance with the current CCA and workshopping solutions. Following Session 2, Scott from Gauge established a smaller CCA Writing Group, made up of representatives from the Working Group. The Writing Group were responsible for drafting the Recommendations Report.

The CCA Writing Group met on Wednesday 10th April and drafted seven key recommendations. A survey containing the draft recommendations was circulated to Working Group members for feedback.

The final session focused on reviewing, amending and refining the drafted recommendations.

CENSW will be arranging for a recall day later in the year to bring the Working Group back together to provide feedback on a draft version of the CCA and further progressions on company rent options for the sector to review.

If you are looking for further information on the proposed solutions to this issue, please contact your co-op Working Group representative or Strategic Impact Senior Manager Lisa Wilson Whatley: *lisawilson.whatley@commonequity.com.au*

Some comments about the process so far:

Planet X co-op member EO, who attended the CCA Working Group meetings, had the following reflections on the process:

"The drafted CCA recommendations indicate a strong desire to strengthen the relationship between the sector and CENSW, creating clear protocols and guidelines that centre co-op autonomy with consistent and transparent communication and support by CENSW.

As a newer co-op member, being a part of the CCA Working Group was not only an opportunity to be a part of making changes to the CCA, but an opportunity for connection; to meet representatives from other co-ops in NSW who brought invaluable personal experience in sustainable co-op living. I hope this experience also encourages further social opportunities and a greater sense of collaboration and connection in the sector."

The seven key areas of recommendations were:

1. Ensuring our CCA supports Co-operative compliance with other legislative and policy documents.
2. That our CCA ensures compliance, outlining steps and measures in the instance of co-op non-compliance.
3. Designing a list of flexible services with opt-in agreements for those co-ops seeking CENSW support in managing certain aspects of co-op workload.
4. An equitable, flexible and sustainable, clearly-defined method for calculating company rent (with co-ops retaining autonomy but that also provides enough combined funds to meet minimum sector costs and enable future growth).
5. Boosting member participation.
6. Cultivating a greater sense of shared purpose and unity between the sector and CENSW.
7. Work to develop ways to support and benefit young and ageing co-op members.

Photo credit: Jamie James Caption: The Palace gardeners

THE PALACE GARDENERS

Abby, Charlie and the choko factory

It was the stuck-at-homeness of Covid that sparked it off. Bee and friends out there weeding, digging, planting - got us started.

Months of diligent street combing, roadside rescue and thrifty scrounging fetched us four bath-tubs, three wheelbarrows and dozens of pots.

Then we scaled it up - buying DIY raised-beds with Community Development Funds - and a truckload of soil to fill them. Our grey concrete yard got a green-over. Every found and purchased vessel was crammed with soil and rich compost, then planted out with vegies, trees and flowers - lots of flowers to brighten those Covid years.

Bok choy, long-beans, snap-peas, snow peas, winter-melons, water-melons, lettuce, spinach, tomatoes, loofahs (yes, like the one in your bathroom), pumpkins, silver beet, beetroot, carrots, cucumber, chillies, zucchini, eggplant, cosmos, passionfruit, sunflowers, succulents, an abundance of basil, and chokoes, chokoes everywhere.

It's so satisfying to wander your own backyard and return to the kitchen with a lemon, fresh salad leaves and a handful of fragrant herbs for that special dish.

The health and financial benefits of tending, cooking and eating home-grown organic produce will only increase with the cost-a-living crisis.
But our garden is much more than just the harvest.

For Abby, especially, it's about being in the garden. Doing gardening. It's about what gardening itself has done for her health.

Struggling with chronic and debilitating illness for many years, Abby rarely left home and did not often venture into the backyard.

The garden changed all that.

Abby says, "I remember the first few months I went down my knee hurt so much - then slowly, slowly got better. Physically, I feel better and mentally, I feel better. I can cope better and I've learnt a lot."

When Charlie gets home from school, it is not uncommon to see her and Abby, heads bowed together over a garden-bed, searching for snails, caterpillars and aphids. And then, perhaps, scattering crushed egg-shells or spraying one of Abby's organic brews, to discourage pests from eating our veggies.

Sometimes bugs still get the lion's share, but sometimes, it all works so well there's a surplus.

Chokoes anyone?

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